Ensemble
Dal
Niente
portrait RE / Flux / Pacific Time

Igor Santos
portrait RE (2025) 16:07

George Lewis
Flux (2014) 11:16

Carola Bauckholt
Pacific Time (2022) 19:13

If you were to take a cross-section of Ensemble Dal Niente's artistic output at this moment in our history, this album is what you would find.

The three works contained here, premiered and recorded in 2022 and 2025, do more than paint a picture of Ensemble Dal Niente's recent programming; they comprise a snapshot of our ongoing work with George Lewis, Igor Santos, and Carola Bauckholt. These pieces, taken together, highlight the real currency with which we turn an idea into a piece, a project, a concert, or an album like the one you are listening to now: relationships.

Relationships built over time and trust, trial and failure, and plans and accidents.

On the cusp of our third decade as an ensemble, we reflect on how we got here. Standard practice incentivizes us to tell our history as a review of major milestones (most music history is retold this way) implying that what happens between such moments is less worthy of mentioning. But for us it's the non-magical, day-to-day work that really counts.

Dal Niente performed *Flux* and the world premiere of *Pacific Time* at the same concert in September of 2022 at DePaul University in Chicago. The concert was part of our Proximity Portrait concert series, highlighting the work of Carola Bauckholt—the culmination of seven years of increasing engagement with Carola and her work.

We first encountered Carola Bauckholt's music when we performed her wind trio, *Zopf*, in 2015. The trio became a staple in our programming, and in 2019, we invited Carola to be the composer-in-residence for the first edition of our Summer Residency for New Music at DePaul University. One of the assignments Carola gave to the group of thirty participants and musicians was to go off into the neighborhood, in groups of three or four, and devise a site-specific piece. Each group had a few hours to find a spot, create some kind of musical-spatial work, and rehearse it. Performances made use of everything from striking bike racks, to exploring the particular acoustics of a stairwell or parking lot. Fences were scraped, intersections were crossed.

Enamored with Carola's particular sense of musical curiosity we broached the topic of a potential new piece for Ensemble Dal Niente. One of her first proposals was to write a work for Dal Niente to perform on a boat while cruising on Chicago's waterways as a reaction to the city's lakeshore architecture. While this idea was a bit out of reach for us (though we're all for new music on boats), water nevertheless found its way into the commission. In *Pacific Time*, performers use a collection of instruments, objects, even toys, to create spectra of white noise evocative of the Pacific coast. The opening is a chorus of jaycalls, which are pipe-like instruments that we played by blowing while covering or uncovering the openings with our hands. Near the end of the piece the ensemble spins waves of *waldteufels* (German folk instruments made from a small drum hanging from a wooden stick by a string). *Pacific Time* ebbs and flows with natural rhythms, suspended in the middle by an extended percussion solo played on a unique arrangement of wooden boxes. Three differently sized resonant boxes are placed with as little seam between them as possible, such that a stick can skate across all three in a circle; scraping across the boxes in quick succession creates three distinct unpitched sounds. To describe this action in the score, Carola uses a small graphic image with three circles, which are re-represented on the cover of this album.

The selection of *Flux* for our 2022 program and on this album was motivated by a kind of artistic resonance that we observe between George and Carola. A parallel musical curiosity, a sense of musical resourcefulness. Something intangible about how their music broadens the scope of possibility. A phrase we often borrow from George is "catch the bus and go along for the ride." Buy a ticket. Get comfy.

It is impossible to understate the influence that George Lewis and his music has had on Dal Niente. Our first conversations with George happened in the early 2010's and threaded their way through projects spanning over a decade.

We first encountered George at the Bowling Green New Music Conference in October 2012. We were terrified. The festival had commissioned a new piece (*Assemblage*) for us to premiere. It was hard. We didn't have a lot of rehearsal time. We were aware of George's superb musicianship, and were afraid of disappointing him. As it turns out,

George is the most supportive and helpful collaborator one could ask for; his first comments to us were not, as we expected, a list of corrections, but rather a friendly comment about his emotional experience of hearing the piece played. It was the start of a proverbial beautiful friendship; since then, we have recorded a portrait album of his works, worked with him around the world, and learned more from him than we could ever encompass in one set of liner notes.

While George quotations frequently show up in Dal Niente rehearsals ("take the bus and go along for the ride"), what we've learned from him more than anything else is that nothing in our field is fixed and everything is changeable. It's easy to assume discourses and practices in new music are fixed, but this is not so. The fiction that genre is something real—not an artificial construct keeping artists apart—readily presents itself as fact. Perhaps this is the case for classical music as a whole: we'll always perform this repertoire, we'll always play this certain kind of way, we'll always play this venue, etc. George helped us grasp just how radically not that way at all everything is. In short, as George might say, we can do things really differently. He makes this point especially forcefully in an interview in *Music In and As Noise* (ed. Aaron Cassidy and Aaron Einbond):

> So when we want change, in the memorable phrase of the rap group Public Enemy, we "bring the noise"—in Egypt, Tunisia, Montreal, or elsewhere. The improvised, spontaneous, seemingly leaderless nature of these and other protests reminds us of the primary remit of new music and new noises: to declare that change is possible.

Not to put too fine a point on it, but these words hit a little differently when re-read them in the US during the turbulent autumn of 2025.

George Lewis says, "*Flux* makes common cause with a 1988 painting by Jeff Donaldson (1932–2004), *JamPact JelliTite (for Jamila)*." The painting springs to life with color. Rhythmic rhomboids proliferate and three massive circles pulsate the foreground. George's musical depiction of these first visual impressions is on-point: a musical depiction could not more elegantly capture the "expressively

awesome…superreal color." Donaldson's painting offers a road map for how one might listen to *Flux*. In it, layers of color eventually reveal musical bodies, hands, mouths, fingertips, in harmony, postures that are somewhere between responding to sound and the performing of it. Fractal-like, the geometric pulses branch out like streams from the foregrounded fingers and merge again.

Like George Lewis, Igor Santos is a composer whose development as an artist has directly influenced Dal Niente's path as an ensemble. We first met Igor when he was a student in the PhD Composition department at the University of Chicago. From 2019 to 2021 Igor joined our staff as Technical Director—a position made much more relevant during lockdown—and managed everything from technical support for virtual concerts to video editing to even setting up a PVC shower curtain (our DIY way of separating musicians) in our rehearsal studio. Since then, he has remained a steadfast friend, and one of the most performed composers in our group's history.

In 2018 Dal Niente performed Igor Santos's *Suggested Affinities*, his dissertation work at the University of Chicago. The concert was part of a series called *Tomorrow's Music Today*. Such a title was apt: we have gone on to commission and perform many more works by Igor including *Anima* (2019), *confined. speak.* (2020), *flautando* (2024), and now *portrait RE*. Igor's music impresses us in new ways every time. He writes with irresistible rhythmic energy, a verve and a swagger, that stretches out with a dizzying number of quick repeats. The sounds he creates become sound-objects as they unfold in time in perspective-shifting permutations, resourcefully spinning something small into a story.

Portrait RE begins with the familiar pops and scratches of a record player or a radio in-between frequencies. Static eventually gives way to familiar digital sounds like the ding from a text message or the tiny plane that carries your email through the vastness of the internet. These sounds trigger our memories and induce behavior. Was that my phone?

Igor mentions repetition, return, and renewal in his notes. In his music, familiar

sounds become something new with each iteration. A building block turned on its side, placed a little higher, fits with another. Three processes, distinct yet interdependent, bend back towards each other, like a reunion with friends.

Somehow, inexplicably, we return a little different than before.

portrait RE (2025)

Written for and commissioned by Ensemble Dal Niente, commissioning support made possible by the Koussevitsky Music Foundation in the Library of Congress

portrait RE is a work for sampler and ensemble, in which found sounds are in continuous dialogue with live instrumentalists. This work is a sequel to *portrait IO*, composed in 2020, and continues the concept of a sonic self-portrait. The piece draws on recordings from daily life, physical surroundings, cultural background, and sounds that trigger strong memories. The title “RE” suggests repetition, return, and renewal.

In many ways, this piece attempts to construct a kind of cinema based on free association. A recurring theme throughout the piece is the impossibility of escapism: efforts to settle into natural or ambient soundscapes are constantly interrupted, only to be gradually acknowledged and absorbed into the fabric of the piece. The work also engages with a line from Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire, who is sampled, quoted, and deconstructed

throughout:

"Os oprimidos devem ser o seu próprio exemplo, na luta pela sua redenção." ("The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption.")

This idea resonates with the piece's treatment of escapism, suggesting that liberation—whether personal or political—cannot be found through retreat, but must emerge from within, through a confrontation with one's own history, and current events. *portrait RE* is dedicated to my dear friends at Ensemble Dal Niente, and was made possible by a commission from the Koussevitzky Music Foundation in the Library of Congress.

—*Igor Santos*

Flux (2014)

Flux makes common cause with a 1988 painting by Jeff Donaldson (1932–2004), *JamPact JelliTite (for Jamila)*. The piece is a sonic response to Donaldson's 1970 call for "Color color Color color that shines, color that is free of rules and regulations... Color that is expressively awesome... superreal color." In *Flux*, quick changes of mood, jump cuts, and a recursive sense of decorating a decoration predominate. The work features a relentlessly high-contrast sensibility; even quiet, contemplative passages never really come to rest, and the piece evinces nonteleological instability and energetic nonlinearity. *Flux* was written for Tim Weiss and the Oberlin Contemporary Music Ensemble.

—*George Lewis*

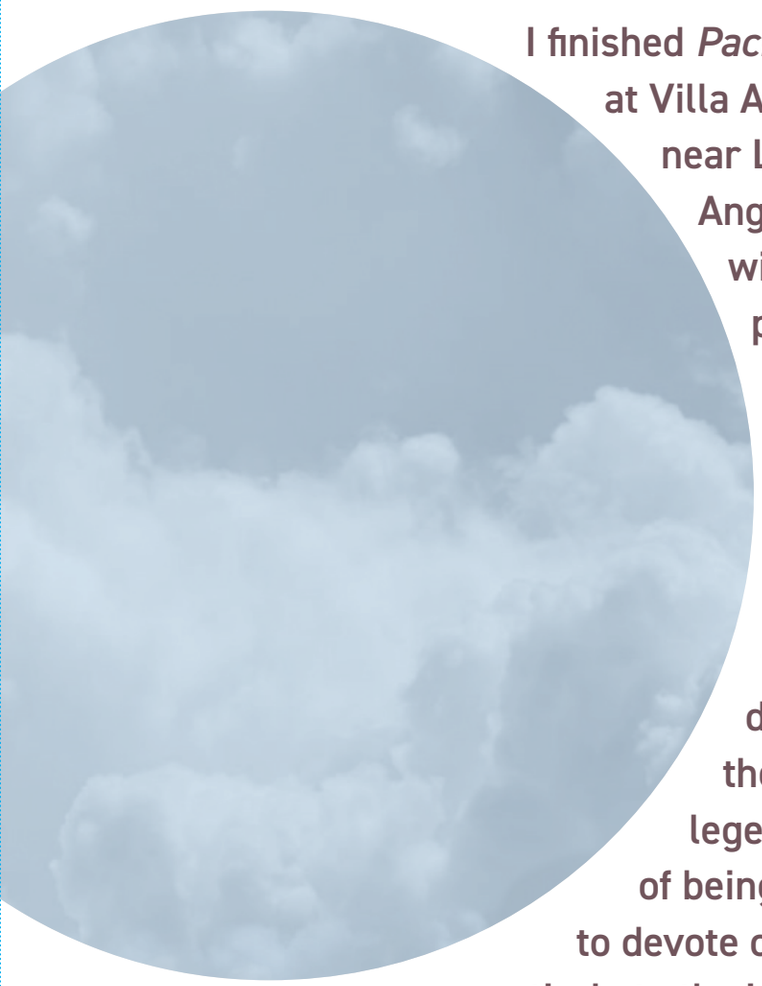
Pacific Time (2022)

In the summer of 2019, before the pandemic, I had a very nice and intense encounter with Ensemble Dal Niente, who performed three of my pieces as part of the De Paul summer course. I was very impressed by their great musicality and sensuality of sound.

That's why I focused entirely on the sound and left out extra musical things such as samples, video, and performance. My inspiration is often ignited by noises.

Sound experiences outside of music challenge me to build a stage for them, to develop a sound space out of it. I track down

the personality of the sounds and sort of create scenes in which they can unfold. For example, *Pacific Time* begins with a dense band of noise as if we're in a very dense fog. Gradually this is exposed differently as if a ray of sun is shining, but we cannot see it.



I finished *Pacific Time* at Villa Aurora near Los Angeles, with daily physical contact with the ocean. At the same time, it describes the privileged state of being able to devote oneself entirely to the idea of sound and to finding solutions with instrumentalists in order to bring it to life. I am painfully aware of this privilege in view of the man-made ecological collapse, which is also fogging up and eating away our spiritual and material resources through warlike destruction, which we would have to use with all our might to redirect and repair.

—Carola Bauckholt

COMPOSERS

Carola Bauckholt was born in Krefeld, Germany, in 1959. After working at the Theater am Marienplatz (TAM), Krefeld for several years, she studied composition at the Musikhochschule Köln with Mauricio Kagel (1978–1984). She founded the Thürmchen Verlag (music publisher) along with Caspar Johannes Walter in 1985, and six years later they founded the Thürmchen Ensemble. She has received numerous residencies and prizes such as the Bernd Alois Zimmermann Scholarship from the city of Cologne (1986), a residency at the Villa Massimo in Rome (1997), in 1998 she was designated the Artist of the Year by the State of North Rhine Westphalia, and she was selected to represent Germany at the World Music Days in Mexico City 1992, Copenhagen 1996, Seoul 1997 and in Zurich 2004. She was awarded the German Composers Prize from the GEMA in the category of experimental music in 2010.

She teaches as guest professor in Santiago di Chile (2010), Ostrava Tschechische Republik (2011 and 2013), Amsterdam (2012 and 2014), Krakau (2012), Zürich (2012), Apeldoorn (2013), Kiev (2013) Oslo (2014 and 2015), Mexico City (2014), Monterrey (2015), London (2015), Moskau and Tschaikovsky City (2016), Valencia, Barcelona and Bludenz (2018) and in Germany.

George E. Lewis is the Edwin H. Case Professor of American Music at Columbia University. A Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy, Lewis's other honors include a MacArthur Fellowship (2002), a Guggenheim Fellowship (2015), a United States Artists Walker Fellowship (2011), an Alpert Award in the Arts (1999), and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Lewis studied composition with Muhal Richard Abrams at the AACM School of Music, and trombone with Dean Hey. A member of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) since 1971, Lewis's work in electronic and computer music, computer-based multimedia installations, and notated and improvisative forms is documented on more than 150 recordings. His work has been presented by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonia Orchestra, Radio-Sinfonieorchester Stuttgart, Mivos Quartet, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, London Sinfonietta, Spektral Quartet, Talea Ensemble, Dinosaur Annex, Ensemble Pamplemousse, Wet Ink, Ensemble Erik Satie, Eco Ensemble, and others, with commissions from American Composers Orchestra, International Contemporary Ensemble, Harvestworks, Ensemble Either/Or, Orkestra Futura, Turning Point Ensemble, San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, 2010 Vancouver Cultural Olympiad, IRCAM, Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra, and others.

Igor Santos Described as "otherworldly and mysteriously familiar" (Chicago Classical Review), and as "exciting andclear... with a striking boldness" (Luigi Nono Competition Prize), Igor Santos' music has been performed internationally, by leading musicians such as Ensemble Modern, Ensemble Intercontemporain, Ensemble Dal Niente, Yarn/Wire, Alarm Will Sound, the American Composers Orchestra, and the Florida Orchestra. His work is centered on mimetic

relationships between found sounds, acoustic instruments, and recently with video, all of which is dramatized through repetition and the use of microtonal keyboards.

Igor has earned degrees in Music Composition from the University of Chicago, the Eastman School of Music, and the University of South Florida. He has been awarded the Rome Prize (2022), a Guggenheim Fellowship (2023), and has won additional prizes such as the Ferruccio Busoni International Piano Competition, the Luigi Nono International Chamber Music Competition, the RED NOTE New Music Festival Competition, the Salvatore Martirano Memorial Composition Award, and was also awarded Best Sound Design from Theater Tampa Bay (for his incidental music).

portrait RE is the fourth premiere of Igor's work by Ensemble Dal Niente, which premiered his *suggested affinities* for solo piano, chamber orchestra, and electronics at University of Chicago in 2018, *anima* for harp and percussion in 2019, as well as *flau-tando* for flute and violin at Epiphany Center for the Arts in 2024.

Igor is a native of Curitiba, Brazil.

PERFORMERS

Portrait RE
Constance Volk, *flute*
Katherine Jimoh, *clarinet*
Ben Roidl-Ward, *bassoon*
Kyle Flens, *percussion*
Ben Melsky, *harp*
Winston Choi, *keyboard*
Minghuan Xu, *violin*
Ammie Brod, *viola*
Chris Wild, *cello*
Michael Martin, *contrabass*
Michael Lewanski, *conductor*

Flux
Constance Volk, *flute*
Andrew Nogal, *oboe*
Zach Good, *clarinet*
Ben Roidl-Ward, *bassoon*
Matt Oliphant, *horn*
Charles Roberts, *trumpet*
Riley Leitch, *trombone*
Ben Melsky, *harp*
Jesse Langen, *electric guitar*
Mabel Kwan, *piano*
Kyle Flens, *percussion*
John Corkill, *percussion*
Hannah Hurwitz, *violin*
Hannah Christiansen, *violin*
Ammie Brod, *viola*

Juan Horie, *cello*
Edward Kass, *contrabass*
Michael Lewanski, *conductor*

Pacific Time
Emma Hospelhorn, *flute, jaycall, waldteufel*
Andrew Nogal, *oboe, jaycall, waldteufel*
Zach Good, *clarinet, jaycall, waldteufel*
Ben Roidl-Ward, *bassoon, jaycall, waldteufel*
Matt Oliphant, *horn, jaycall, waldteufel*
Ben Melsky, *harp, jaycall, waldteufel, box/brush*
Jesse Langen, *electric guitar, jaycall, waldteufel*
Mabel Kwan, *piano, jaycall, box/brush, waldteufel*
Kyle Flens, *percussion, waldteufel*
Hannah Hurwitz, *violin, jaycall, waldteufel*
Hannah Christiansen, *violin, jaycall, waldteufel*
Ammie Brod, *viola, jaycall, waldteufel*
Chris Wild, *cello, jaycall, waldteufel*
Edward Kass, *contrabass, jaycall, waldteufel*
Michael Lewanski, *conductor*

Rehearsing Carola's music, the day-to day

CREDITS

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(portrait RE)

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And Ensemble Dal Niente's musicians, collaborators, board members, supporters, friends, and family

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After recording *Pacific Time* at DePaul University HPC 2022

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